

First Peter 2:18-20  
Godward Submission in the Workplace part 1

Purpose: To encourage all believers to have a Godward attitude at work

Introduction: Peter first gives the **practical** (2:18-20) commands, then the **theological** reasoning behind the commands (2:21-25). While we are not household servants today, we do work under the authority of others. The Word of God does not commend slavery; it regulates it. It is not our job as a congregation to change social institutions. However, when individuals are transformed by God's grace, social institutions may indeed change.

- 1) To whom does Peter write?—2:18 <sup>18</sup> *Household servants* [οἰκέτης]
  - a) Slavery is not an institution ordained by God. It is one of the results of the Fall.
  - b) Term used only in the NT in: Luke 16:13; Acts 10:7; & Romans 14:4
    - i) They might be highly educated, and have great duties in the home. Some servants actually owned their own slaves.
    - ii) They became servants by birth, by kidnapping, by capture in war, or by personal choice.
  - c) Some of these Jewish Christians were serving as domestic servants. God does not address their legal **rights**, but their moral **responsibilities**.
    - i) Slaves were not considered full persons and thus did not have moral responsibility. By addressing them directly, Peter raises their status in their culture. In the congregation they were full and equal persons.
    - ii) He recognizes they are the more vulnerable person in the work relationship, as is the wife in the marriage relationship in 3:1-7. They did not have legal rights within the Roman Empire, and were subject to various abuses and mistreatment by their owners.
    - iii) Pastor John Gill states that the Jews thought that because they were the seed of Abraham, they ought not to be the servants of anyone.
- 2) What are they to do? *be submitting yourselves* [pres. mid./pass. ptc. ὑποτάσσω, used as an imperative]
  - a) WHAT does it mean to submit to your boss?—2:13
    - i) Voluntarily renouncing my will for the will of my God-ordained authority, recognizing my exact God-assigned place in society, embracing my dependent status toward God and His delegated authorities over me, and making my strengths and abilities available to their service.
    - ii) It involves accepting their commands, fulfilling their conditions, seeking to please my superiors, while granting them the honor that is due them in their God-assigned position.
    - iii) But ultimately this submission is limited. No person can rule your soul.

b) How are they to submit? *in [ἐν] all [πᾶς] awe [φόβος]* (of God—1:17; 2:17; 3:2, 15)

- i) Proper awe of God will breed healthy respect for those over us at work.
- ii) “All awe” tells us that no half-hearted attitude is acceptable.
- iii) See the parallel concept of “conscience toward God” in 2:19.
- iv) The NT world taught slaves to worship their master’s god/gods. Peter, by the Spirit, demands that slaves stand in awe of the True God.

c) To WHOM are they to submit? *to the (absolute) owners [δεσπότης]*,

- The character or conduct of the master is not the basis for submission
- i) Negatively—not only [οὐ μόνον] to ...
  - (1) *the good [ἀγαθός]*—beneficial
  - (2) *and equitable ones [ἐπιεικής]*—those who show restraint, who are tolerant, courteous, reasonable, fair, considerate, who do not insist on the letter of the law but the spirit of the law
- ii) Positively—but also [ἀλλά καί] to the *unscrupulous ones [σκολιός]*,—those who are morally crooked or perverse, who individually reflect the perverse culture in which they live and move (Acts 2:40; Philippians 2:15)
  - (1) These may be those who are ill-natured or ill-tempered, and demanding; who demand more work than is normally required; use harsh words, and harder physical punishment; who withhold appropriate of food from them, and keep back their wages

3) WHY are they to submit?—2:19-20 (series of three 1<sup>st</sup> class conditional clauses, assumed true for the sake of argument)

a) Situation # 1—Godward suffering of hardships—2:19 <sup>19</sup> *because [γάρ]* ...

- i) Declaration—*this [οὗτος] is commendable [χάρις]* (before God), *if [εἰ]* ...
  - (1) Similar to “finding favor with God” Genesis 6:8; 18:3; etc.
- ii) What are they doing? *someone [τις] bears up under [pres. act. ind. ὑποφέρω]* *hardships [λύπη]*
  - (1) They may suffer harsh words, accusations, condemnations, or physical punishment
- iii) Why do they do this? *because of [διά]* *conscience [συνείδησις]* (consciousness) *toward God [θεός]*
  - (1) They are aware of what God desires and their allegiance to Him
- iv) When are they doing this? *while suffering [pres. act. ptc. πάσχω]* *unjustly [ἀδίκως]*.
  - (1) Similar to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:10-12
  - (2) Peter does not deny that their suffering as slaves is morally unjust.
- v) Suffering is not a blessing in and of itself, but, if one’s duty to God is involved, then one can meet it with gladness of heart.

b) Situations # 2 & # 3—2:20a

- i) Negatively—situation # 2—no posing as martyrs allowed—2:20a <sup>20</sup> *For [γάρ]* ...

- (1) Question—*what credit* [ποῖος κλέος] (to yourself before God) *is there, if* [εἰ] ...
  - (2) What are they doing? *you<sup>pl</sup> will endure* [fut. act. ind. ὑπομένω]
  - (3) When are they doing this? *when* ...
    - (a) *you<sup>pl</sup> are sinning* [pres. act. ptc. ἀμαρτάνω]
    - (b) *and* [καὶ] *are being physically mistreated* [pres. pass. ptc. κολαφίζω]?
      - (i) To strike with the hand (slap) or the fist (punch)
        - This is what Jesus experienced: Matthew 26:67
        - This is what Paul experienced: physically—1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:11; and spiritually—2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7
      - (c) To endure a well-deserved beating is nothing extraordinary.
- ii) Positively—situation # 3—Godward endurance results in rewards—2:20b  
*But* [ἀλλά] ...
  - (1) Declaration—*this* [οὗτος] *is commendable* [χάρις] *before* [παρά] *God* [θεός] *if* [εἰ] ...
    - (a) The suffering alone is not commendable, but rather being committed to God's sovereign will in such a way that our self-denying, self-sacrificing devotion to Christ overrides our personal comfort. It is Godward submission to *undeserved* suffering that finds favor with God because such behavior demonstrates His grace.
    - (b) This is expanded in the next section (2:21-25)
  - (2) What are they doing? *you<sup>pl</sup> will endure* [fut. act. ind. ὑπομένω]
  - (3) When are they doing this? *when* ...
    - (a) *you<sup>pl</sup> are doing good* [pres. act. ptc. ἀγαθοποιέω]
    - (b) *and* [καὶ] *are suffering* [pres. act. ptc. πάσχω],
- 4) Looking back:
  - a) **Passive** suffering is not pleasing to God. **Actively** suffering for doing good with the right heart attitude is what is commendable before God.
  - b) The fleshly tendency for us in our suffering is to either retaliate toward those who caused our suffering or to sit and pout about how bad we have it. Neither response is Biblical because they both focus on self, not God.
  - c) Whose opinion matters more? What is it worth to you to hear God say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”?
- 5) Looking ahead: The next two Sundays we will look at the background to 2:21-25 from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and the example of Jesus as He suffered injustice in a Godward manner.
- 6) **Take-home truth:** Suffering well to the glory of God will someday be rewarded